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**Subject:** [WQ News] Comment: Fracking causes pollution and earthquakes  
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Los Angeles

[IMAGE]

Comment: Fracking causes pollution and earthquakes

By Kristin Lynch

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California's Department of Conservation is holding hearings in Long Beach Wednesday to hear what the communities have to say about the controversial oil and gas drilling method called hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. Fracking has been found to pollute water and air, exacerbate climate change, erode property values and create tremendous amounts of waste; the disposal of which has caused earthquakes.

If the department is really listening, they will hear loud and clear that no amount of regulation is enough to truly protect public health and the environment.

Fracking needs to be banned entirely.

Fracking has been happening in California for decades, but largely as an afterthought to wring out more oil and gas from aging wells. The new generation of drilling and fracking that the oil and gas industry now hopes to use in California marks a radical departure. But a more destructive method of fracking has recently come into practice that involves injecting thousands of gallons of toxic chemicals and millions of gallons of fresh water at high pressure to break apart rocks to extract oil and gas.

As fracking intensifies in California, state lawmakers, regulators and environmentalists are pushing for greater transparency regarding the practice, leading some oil producers to voluntarily post information about their fracking operations to a national database. After months of trying to sidestep the issue and suggesting that trial lawyers and the state's "very vigorous tort system" was enough to protect California's aquifer from fracking, Gov. Jerry Brown now says that he will seek money in the next state budget to write regulations for the extraction method. But neither industry self-policing nor stronger regulation will fully protect our environment and public health from fracking.

One piece of legislation to require well operators to notify neighbors before beginning to drill, Senate Bill 1054, was just voted down and another disclosure bill, Assembly Bill 591, will likely suffer the same fate. But even if this bill survives, it doesn't do enough to protect the environment and public health. While it would require operators to disclose where they are fracking and the amounts of water and chemicals used in their operations, it allows the companies to claim exemptions from this reporting requirement if the chemical formula is considered a trade secret.

Merely informing people that land adjacent to theirs is about to be fracked and providing a partial list of

the chemicals that are going to be dumped into the earth is hardly sufficient protection. Plus, the oil and gas industry has successfully circumvented regulation before.

There are 18,000 known oil and gas wells in the state but no state agency monitors or regulates fracking. The state does not require oil and gas drilling companies to disclose any information about the fracking they do.

Many of the chemicals oil and gas companies are using in fracking fluids are far from safe, but thanks to the "Halliburton Loophole," fracking is exempt from the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Nationally, oil and gas drilling, including fracking, has been linked to more than 1,000 cases of contaminated water supplies. In Pavillion, Wyo., the EPA draft study found fracking likely caused contamination in the groundwater. Three spills within a week polluted a wetland and caused a fish die-off, leading state regulators in Dimock, Penn., to order Cabot Oil & Gas Corporation to cease all fracking in the county. In Garfield County, Colo., a groundwater study found methane levels increasing with the increase in the number of wells drilled.

To complicate matters, the disposal of fracking wastewater by injecting it in underground disposal wells is causing minor earthquakes. California is home to more fault lines and more 3.0 plus magnitude earthquakes than any other state in the mid-continental U.S. Do we really need more reason to worry about the ground shifting beneath our feet?

The evidence is clear that fracking risks vital drinking water resources and triggers a slew of other environmental, public health and safety concerns. With two watered-down disclosure bills - one dead and one on life support - and a governor who isn't taking the problems associated with fracking seriously, the only logical thing to do is ban the practice in California until it can be proven safe - just as the Vermont State Legislature did last month and more than 100 other U.S. municipalities have already done.

Kristin Lynch is Pacific region director of Food & Water Watch.

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